

Verdict Reached In Negligence Case

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A jury reached a verdict on Wednesday in a case claiming the promoter of Michael Jackson's comeback concert was negligent in hiring the doctor who killed him.

The panel of six men and six women began deliberating on Sept. 26, more than five months after the start of the trial that offered an unprecedented look into the superstar's private life.

Jackson's mother sued concert promoter AEG Live LLC over the hiring of Dr. Conrad Murray, who was convicted of involuntary manslaughter for giving Jackson an overdose of the anesthetic propofol in 2009.

Katherine Jackson claimed AEG Live should have done a thorough background check on Murray.

The company denied hiring Murray and said he had been picked by the singer as the doctor for his upcoming shows.

Computer Glitches Put Pressure On Fixes

WASHINGTON (AP) — The pressure is on for the federal government and states running their own health insurance exchanges to get the systems up and running after overloaded websites and jammed phone lines frustrated consumers for a second day as they tried to sign up for coverage using the new marketplaces.

In some ways, the delays that persisted Wednesday were good news for President Barack Obama and supporters of his signature domestic policy achievement because the holdups showed what appeared to be exceptionally high interest in the overhauled insurance system. But if the glitches aren't fixed quickly, they could dampen enthusiasm for the law at the same time Republicans are using it as a rallying cry to keep most of the federal government closed.

"It was worse today than it was yesterday," Denise Rathman of Des Moines said after she tried for a second day to log onto the Iowa site.

Rathman has insurance through Dec. 31 but said she is eager to sign up for a policy because of her psoriatic arthritis, which has caused her to be denied insurance in the past.

David Berge, a pastor with two young children in Shoreview, Minn., tried unsuccessfully at least 10 times to create an online account on the state-run site MNsure. His high-deductible plan expires at the end of the year.

NSA Does Not Track Social Media

WASHINGTON (AP) — National Security Agency chief Gen. Keith Alexander revealed Wednesday that his spy agency once tested whether it could track Americans' cellphone locations, in addition to its practice of sweeping broad information about calls made.

Alexander and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper testified at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on proposed reforms to the NSA's surveillance of phone and internet usage around the world, exposed in June by former NSA analyst Edward Snowden. But neither spy chief discussed proposed reforms; instead they were questioned about new potential abuses that have come to light since then.

Alexander denied a *New York Times* report published Saturday that said NSA searched social networks of Americans searching for foreign terror connections, and detailed 12 previously revealed cases of abuse by NSA employees who used the network for unsanctioned missions like spying on a spouse. He said all employees were caught and most were disciplined.

Alexander and Clapper also told lawmakers that the government shutdown that began Tuesday over a budget impasse is seriously damaging the intelligence community's ability to guard against threats. They said they're keeping counterterrorism staff at work as well as those providing intelligence to troops in Afghanistan, but that some 70 percent of the civilian workforce has been furloughed. Any details on the jobs held by the furloughed employees is classified.

Congress is mulling changes to the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act that some believe allows the NSA too much freedom in gathering U.S. data as part of spying on targets overseas.

Obama, Lawmakers Discuss Shutdown

BY DAVID ESPO
AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama brought congressional leaders to the White House on Wednesday for the first time since a partial government shutdown began, but there were no signs of progress toward ending an impasse that has idled 800,000 federal workers and curbed services around the country.

Obama "refuses to negotiate," House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, told reporters after private talks that lasted more than an hour. "All we're asking for here is a discussion and fairness for the American people under Obamacare."

But Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada said moments later, "We're locked in tight on Obamacare" and neither the president nor Democrats will accept changes in the nation's three-year-old health care law as the price for spending legislation needed to end the two-day partial shutdown.

With the nation's ability to borrow money soon to lapse, Republicans and Democrats alike said the shutdown could last for two weeks or more, and soon oblige a divided government to grapple with both economy-threatening issues at the same time.

The high-level bickering at microphones set up outside the White House reflected the day's proceedings in the Capitol.

The Republican-controlled House approved legislation to reopen the nation's parks and the National Institutes of Health, even though many Democrats criticized them as part of a piecemeal approach that fell far short of what was needed. The bills face dim prospects in the Senate, and the White House threatened to veto both in the unlikely event they make it to Obama's desk.

"What we're trying to do is to get the government open as quickly as possible," said the House majority leader, Rep. Eric Cantor of Virginia. "And all that it would take is us realizing we have a lot in agreement."

Earlier, an attempt by Democrats to force shutdown-ending legislation to the House floor failed on a 227-197 vote, with all Republicans in opposition. That left intact the tea party-driven strategy of demanding changes to the nation's health care overhaul as the price for essential federal financing, despite grumbling from Republican moderates.

The stock market ended lower as Wall Street CEOs, Europe's central banker and traders pressed for a solution before serious damage is done to the economy. Chief executives from the nation's biggest financial firms met Obama for more than an hour Wednesday, some of them plainly frustrated with the tactics at play in Congress and with the potential showdown coming over the debt limit.

"You can re-litigate these policy issues in a political forum, but we shouldn't use threats of causing the U.S. to fail on its obligations to repay its debt as a cudgel," Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, said after the meeting.

Democrats were scathing in their criticism.

"The American people would get better government out of Monkey Island at



OLIVIER DOULIERI/ABACA PRESS/MCT
Speaker of the House John Boehner (R-Ohio) speaks to the media after meeting with President Barack Obama in Washington, D.C., on Wednesday. The president and congressional leaders struggled today to find a path to ending the federal government shutdown.

the local zoo than we're giving them today," said Rep. John Dingell of Michigan.

The Republican National Committee announced it would pay for personnel needed to reopen the World War II Memorial, a draw for aging veterans from around the country that is among the sites shuttered. In a statement, party chairman Reince Priebus challenged Democrats "to join with us in keeping this memorial open."

Democrats labeled that a stunt. "We've already been working on a plan to open the Memorial — and the entire government — after the GOP caused them to close," said party spokesman Mo Elie-thee. "It's called a clean" spending bill.

As it turned out, more than 125 World War II veterans from Mississippi and Iowa who were initially kept out of the memorial Tuesday were escorted to the site with the help of members of Congress. Officials made further arrangements to allow veterans groups into the memorial during the shutdown.

A sampling of federal agencies showed how unevenly the shutdown was felt across the government.

The Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Housing and Urban Development listed only six percent of their employees as essential, and therefore permitted to work during the impasse. James R. Clapper, director of national intelligence, said about 70 percent of civilian employees in agencies under his control had been sent home.

By contrast, about 86 percent of employees of the Department of Homeland Security remained on the job, and 95 percent at the Veterans Affairs Department.

One furloughed employee, meteorologist Amy Fritz, said, "I want to get back to work." At a news conference arranged by congressional Democrats, the 38-year-old National Weather Service employee said she has more than \$100,000 in student loan debt and is looking at ways to cut her budget.

In an interview with CNBC before meeting with lawmakers, Obama said he would not negotiate with Republicans until the government is reopened and Congress votes to raise the debt limit.

"If we get in the habit where a few folks, an extremist wing of one party, whether it's Democrat or Republican, are allowed to extort concessions based on a

threat (to) undermine the full faith and credit of the United States, then any president who comes after me, not just me, will find themselves unable to govern effectively," he said.

"The White House said Obama would have to truncate a long-planned trip to Asia, calling off the final two stops in Malaysia and the Philippines.

The shutdown also intruded into the race for governor of Virginia.

Terry McAuliffe, the Democrat, said he supported legislation to guarantee retroactive pay for furloughed federal employees. The Republican contender, Ken Cuccinelli, called on members of Congress to decline their pay as long as the shutdown lasts.

The House sidetracked legislation Tuesday night to reopen some veterans programs, the national parks and a portion of the Washington, D.C., municipal government. All three bills fell short of the two-thirds majority needed when Democrats voted overwhelmingly against this.

Republicans tried again, this time under rules requiring only a simple majority. The parks measure was approved on a vote of 252-173, with 23 Democrats breaking ranks and voting in favor. The vote to reopen NIH was 254-171. The House also voted to allow the Washington, D.C., government to use the taxes it collects to operate programs.

Votes were deferred on more bills, one to assure pay for members of the National Guard and Reserves and another to allow some veterans programs to resume.

The NIH bill was added to the day's agenda after Democrats had said seriously ill patients would be turned away from the facility's hospital of last resort, and no new enrollment permitted in experimental treatments.

Democratic Rep. Louise Slaughter of New York said the Republican response was a ploy. "Every time they see a bad headline they're going to bring a bill to the floor and make it go away," she said.

Some Republicans took obvious pleasure in the rough rollout Tuesday of new health insurance markets created under Obama's health care law. Widespread online glitches prevented many people from signing up for coverage that begins in January.

Affordable

af-ford-a-ble

Adjective

1. Believed to be within one's financial means.

Synonyms: bargain, budget, inexpensive, popular

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